

Strategy Research Project

Professionalizing the Force: Certification and Competency in the U.S. Army

by

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**Professionalizing the Force:
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Abstract

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Professionalizing the Force: Certification and Competency in the U.S. Army

There is much development, education, and implementing work remaining for the Army to accomplish its third military expertise critical task - certifying the expertise of Army professionals and units.¹

—ADRP 1(draft)

The Army provides the Nation with the land forces necessary to help prevent, shape, and win conflict with any adversary. As an institution, the Army Profession performs this unique service for a client - the American people - who are unable to provide for their own security and defense. The American people trust the Army to effectively and ethically apply resources to achieve the Nation's desired ends. This trust in the Army Profession, earned through a history of obedient service to civilian control, military effectiveness, and diligent stewardship of the profession, affords the Army a great deal of autonomy for self regulation and governing. In short, "what right looks like" is generally left for the Army to determine and propose to civilian leaders for approval and resourcing. The Army will maintain such professional autonomy only as long as it remains effective in providing its unique service to the American people.²

Certification – the verification and validation of an Army professional's competence, character, and commitment to fulfill responsibilities and perform assigned duties with discipline and to standard³ – is required to ensure the effectiveness of the Army Profession. The Army has relied over the years on a number of systems to certify individual expertise; evaluation reports, the official promotion system, professional education and testing, and centralized selections of those to fill leadership positions.⁴

These institutional methods are necessary but may not be sufficient to reverse worrisome trends or provide the most effective and ethical Army Profession for our

nation. To reinvigorate a professional culture and ensure effectiveness throughout the emerging force drawdown, resource austerity, and complex national security challenges of the 21st century, the Army needs a more robust certification framework.

The 2011 US Army Profession Campaign (henceforth The Campaign) noted the Army's mixed record of navigating previous transitions such as post- WWII, post-Vietnam, and the post-Cold War draw downs.⁵ The Campaign findings recognize the enduring importance of certification in stewarding the profession through such turbulent periods as we enter the post-OIF/OEF era and recommends leveraging existing certification measures and "creating limited new certification systems where needed."⁶ This paper advances the discourse on certification presently found in new draft Army doctrinal publications and the Department of the Army 2013 campaign *America's Army – Our Profession*. Specifically, this paper highlights several key tenets of effective certification programs and proposes a new competency assessment framework relevant for the Total Army. Promulgation and inculcation of these key tenets and proposed framework – once fully matured – will enhance development of military expertise, advance the profession's meritocratic culture, and increase effectiveness in developing competency, character, and commitment. As The US Army Profession Campaign found, "The Army is strong – but we have work to do to make us stronger."⁷

Why We Must Certify Within the Army Profession

ADRP 1 (draft) defines the Army Profession as a "unique vocation of experts certified in the design, generation, support, and ethical application of land combat power, serving under civilian authority and entrusted to defend the Constitution and the rights and interests of the American people".⁸ The Army Profession is comprised of the uniformed members of the Army (Profession of Arms) and the non-uniformed

Department of the Army Civilians (Army Civilian Corps).⁹ This paper addresses certification tenets for only the uniformed members of the profession. Much of the underlying logic concerning certification is applicable to the Army Civilian Corps but further exploration is outside the scope of this work. Currently the Army uses certification to assess individual and unit competency and validate to the American people the Army's ability to fulfill responsibilities and perform assigned duties with discipline and to standard.¹⁰

To begin with, rationale for certification exists in professions outside the Army. The National Environmental Health Association details ten reasons a professional should seek certification. The reasons are: demonstrates commitment to the profession; enhances the profession's image; builds self-esteem; establishes professional credentials; improves career opportunities and achievement; prepares individuals for greater on-the-job responsibilities; provides for greater earnings potential; improves skills and knowledge; and, offers greater professional recognition from peers.¹¹ These reasons are entirely applicable to the Army Profession and well summarize the current discourse on the benefits and methods of professional certification. They also reinforce the principles of the new doctrine in ADRP 1 (draft) and the goals of the 2013 America's Army – Our Profession campaign undertaken to inspire understanding of the Army Profession and enhance the Army's professional identity, culture, and commitment.¹²

Second, the Army recognizes that to develop and maintain its military expertise, some form of certification must be inherent in the process. Thus, one of the tasks identified by the Army as critical to the development of its military expertise is “certify the

expertise of Army professionals and units.”¹³ The Army posits that certification will ensure professional expertise, prompt greater self-development among Army professionals, and engender trust with the American people through demonstrated qualification and effectiveness.¹⁴ Trust is one of the five essential characteristics of the Army profession. Earned trust by the American public affords the Army profession great autonomy regarding norms, practices, and doctrine. In his 2011 work, “Assessing the Army Profession”, Charles Allen notes a number of polls that reveal Americans’ exceptionally high confidence in the US military.¹⁵ Sustaining professional expertise, through certification, is necessary to sustain such high public regard and trust even when the American people increasingly do not support the national goals the military is used to pursue.

Another task identified as critical for developing the Army’s military expertise is “apply Army expertise under mission command.”¹⁶ Some of the characteristics of mission command are “...competent leaders...applying expertise...and high moral discretionary judgment...in climate of trust...devoid of bureaucratic micromanagement.”¹⁷ In short, mission command relies on empowering subordinates and trusting them to accomplish the mission, in accordance with orders, through effective and ethical application of their military expertise. Certification is an excellent leaders’ tool to validate subordinates leadership, expertise, judgment, and ability to succeed under the principles of mission command.

Charles Allen’s analysis of earlier efforts to “professionalize” the force provides other reasons to strengthen certification measures. Certification of competency provides valuable focus and prioritization during turbulent periods such as institutional

restructuring, fiscal cutbacks, and force downsizing. General Sullivan, then the Army Chief of Staff, used the slogan “No More Task Force Smiths” to convey his fear that downsizing post-Cold War would jeopardize the Army’s focus and its ability to provide its military expertise.¹⁸ ADRP 1 (draft) captures this same concern by stating, “With another post-war transition now upon the Army, the challenge is to not allow the Army’s well-earned status as an effective profession to deteriorate by the loss of a professional culture and its capabilities.”¹⁹ Of particular concern, without diligent attention and stewardship, the Army risks ascendancy of a bureaucratic culture instead of the desired professional culture due to pressures of fiscal constraints, downsizing, more dwell time at home station, and high profile ethical failures.²⁰ In fact, it was astute observations by today’s senior leaders, similar to those of General Sullivan nearly 20 years ago, that prompted the 2011 US Army Profession Campaign. The Secretary of the Army and the Army Chief of Staff directed the campaign team to “take a hard look at ourselves to ensure we understand what we have been through over the past nine years, how we have changed, and how we must adapt to succeed in an era of persistent conflict.”²¹ No matter the era, expert application and practice of military expertise is necessary to provide effective security and the defense for the American people.

In its “hard look” at the Army Profession, the campaign team discovered a number of disconcerting indicators. First, it found a sense of tolerance of mediocrity that not only reduced the Army’s professional identity and collective motivation to excel but also caused the development of certification criteria and standards that were not perceived as meaningful and therefore allowed some individuals to advance prematurely. Second, the team assessed that there was no common conceptual

architecture for the progression of professionalism across the Total Army, no consistent set of criteria for certification at any level, whether for generalists or specialists...and an uneven appreciation for professional certification standards across the Army. Third, it determined that “certification” is not a term used by the force and there is no systemic method to capture and record many of the “certification” events. Fourth, the team found that the Army lacked sufficient doctrine, frameworks, and concepts to adequately describe, communicate, and assess itself as a profession. Fifth, it stated that more prevalent certification will increase confidence in members’ military expertise, engender greater trust, and produce readiness reporting that is more accurate. Consequently, The Campaign team recommended the implementation or re-invigoration of professional certification procedures to include measures of performance or effectiveness to add rigor to the profession.²²

The Army’s Certification Plan

ADRP 1 (draft) defines certification as the “verification and validation of an Army professional’s competence, character, and commitment (the “3 Cs”) to fulfill responsibilities and perform assigned duties with discipline and standards.”²³

The three certification criteria are:

Competence or proficiency in expert work: The application of the Army’s expertise often entails risk to the warrior, the unit, the mission, and the Army profession. Thus, the individual’s personal competence must be certified by the Army commensurate with the grade of the individual professional and the level of the work to be performed.

Moral Character requisite to being an Army professional: As Army professionals make continuous discretionary judgments; only members of the profession with high moral character can do so consistently well. Certification verifies that the individual willingly lives and advances the Army’s ethic in all actions such that the Army Profession is a self-policing, meritocratic institution.

Resolute Commitment to the Army's duty: Army professionals consider service more than just a job. It means to be primarily motivated by the intrinsic factors of sacrifice and service to others and the nation rather than being motivated by extrinsic factors related to a job – such as pay, vacations, work hours, etc.²⁴

ADRP 1 (draft) details the role individual certifications play in the progressive development of all Army Professionals. Uniformed members of the Army Profession remain “aspiring professionals” until completing initial certification in the 3 Cs by the Army's institutional training base (e.g. Advance Individual Training, Officer Basic Course, and Warrant Officer Candidate School). Serving professionals continue progressive certifications or re-certification through training, education, evaluations, promotions, and assignments. Such certifications or re-certifications are the responsibility of Army branches and proponents. The Army purposefully uses the centralized selection processes for promotion, professional education, and command positions to certify talent, proficiency, and personal characteristics for continued service and increased responsibility.

The current Army process, however, falls short of a fully implemented program to certify the 3 Cs through balanced and measurable standards across the domains of leader development; educational/institution, self-development/experience, and organizational/training.²⁵

Unfortunately, through ten years of constant deployment, “certification” has too often become associated with merely completing – or attempting to complete – the expansive list of mandatory pre-deployment tasks. The unit commander, through memoranda to appropriate headquarters, “certifies” that all personnel have completed every required task prior to deployment. Such bureaucratic “check-list” certification is often not feasible when complementary systems for equipping and manning do not align

with certification requirements. Furthermore, such onerous, one-size-fits-all, and slow-to-evolve certification requirements detract from commanders' ability to focus on their training and certification priorities derived from their own mission analysis and risk assessment.

From my experience as a commander, any certification program must first prompt the development and application of military expertise without becoming overbearing or causing the ascendancy of a bureaucratic culture - the best programs motivate professionals to seek advancement. Second, certification programs must also permit commanders some measure of discretionary judgment and be flexible enough to incorporate new or revised certification requirements. Commanders have the most flexibility when programs employ both objective and subjective components – allowing commanders to leverage their years of experience in training and leader development to render certification decisions. Third, programs must balance the tenets of mission command – empowerment and trust (professionalism) – against the logical need for certification standardization (bureaucracy). Fourth, adjacent Army systems such as readiness reporting, evaluations, promotions, assignments, and talent management must be fully nested with the certification programs to promote a meritocratic culture and reinforce the significance of and commitment to certification. If not, certification will remain a little enforced, poorly employed, peripheral concept – viewed as having little impact on individual advancement or professional status.

Two Certification Programs to Study

Presented below are two illustrative certification programs for military-technical competency that in the main meet these four criteria. The aviation certification program is a branch-wide program, common to all uniformed and non-uniformed professionals

performing duties in Army aircraft. The field artillery program is an organization specific program. The purpose of the illustrative case studies is to highlight the key tenets of two already existing certification programs from which we can draw insights for the Army's larger certification needs.

Army Aviation Case Study

Army Aviation uses a prescriptive training guide, developed at the branch level, for certification/re-certification of military-technical competency across the total aviation force. Training Circular (TC) 3-04.11, *Commander's Aircrew Training Program for Individual, Crew, and Collective Training* (henceforth *The Commander's Guide*) details the methods by which every individual progresses from an initial certification to positions of increased responsibility and authority through progressive certifications and re-certifications.²⁶ *The Commander's Guide* is not an aircraft operators manual or a how-to-fly manual, rather it details an aircraft and rank agnostic certification program. Certification – or standardization in aviation typology – requirements are irrespective of military rank and delineated solely by aircraft duty position (e.g. pilot, crew chief, flight engineer).

The Commander's Guide defines the sequence of professional advancement for every aircrewmember. For instance, after initial certification every pilot strives for further certification as a pilot-in-command and then Air Mission Commander. Warrant Officers also seek additional certifications in specialized military-technical competencies (called "tracks") such as instructor pilot, maintenance test pilot, or experimental test pilot. Enlisted aircrewmembers similarly progress through certifications such as crewchief, flight instructor, and flight examiner. Each certification is further stratified by sequential readiness levels (RL3 (lowest) to RL1 (highest) that further denotes

competency within each certification level. Some certifications have caveats to restrict performance of certain tasks until demonstrating further competency. Examples include pilot-in-command (but from back seat only), pilot-in-command (but not for night vision goggle flight), and pilot (but restricted from snow landings).

Prescribed in *The Commander's Guide* are the requirements and evaluation measures to attain each certification level. So too are the common duties and annual re-certification requirements for every level of certification. Annual re-certification requirements prescribe minimum aircraft and simulator flight hours, minimum iterations and conditions for mandatory flight tasks, and oral and written examination topics. Prescribed also are the tasks, conditions, and standards for the annual competency evaluation (the Annual Performance and Readiness Test, or APART). Evaluation authorities and responsibilities--who can evaluate and determine "qualified" -- are also prescribed along with the process and available consequences should an aircrewmember fail a re-certification. Possible consequences include retraining, restriction of aviation duties, forfeiture of special incentive pays, removal from aviation flight status, or de-certification as an Army Aviator and transfer from the Aviation Branch or separation from the Army.

There is also a temporal component to the certification program. *The Commander's Guide* prescribes the maximum permitted time for commencement of the certification process upon arriving at each new duty station and further prescribes the maximum time permitted for progression to successively higher readiness levels (RL2, and RL1). Personnel possessing a special skill certification or serving in certain duty positions must attain additional certifications within a specified time. For example,

Warrant Officers with a certification in one of the special skill or “tracks” (instruction, safety, maintenance, or tactical operations) must attain certification as a pilot-in-command within 180 days of assignment to the associated billet. Likewise, except for some well-defined exceptions, aviation company commanders must attain certification as pilot-in-command within 180 days of assuming command. The Commander’s Guide also defines the process and consequences for failure to progress according to the prescribed timelines.

The Commander’s Guide does provide the commander some flexibility concerning the certification measures previously described. The commander may waive (no longer required) or suspend (required but postponed) some aircrewmember certifications based on equipment availability or environmental conditions. Within prescribed limits, commanders may also provide additional time to attain the required readiness level or certifications.

The Commander’s Guide prescribes a number of additional programs and provides a general (minimum required) framework for these. Programs include certification for mission briefers and mission approval personnel, air mission commanders, and pilots in command. Air Mission Commander and pilot-in-command programs are the most comprehensive of these aviation programs and evaluate a broad range of military-technical expertise, discretionary judgment, and leadership. These certification programs may include nominations for certification from other aviation professionals, endorsement from a unit review board, and final assessment and certification by the unit commander. Comprehensive full mission profile and scenario

based evaluations provide excellent opportunities to evaluate professional judgment and leadership in various conditions.

Besides unit leadership, aviation units have a number of essential entities that shepherd the certification program. The aviation brigade Standardization Instructor Pilot and the brigade Master Gunner (usually senior Warrant Officers) are the proverbial “keepers of the flame” with regard to the unit commander’s standardization and certification programs. Similar duty positions in subordinate organizations perform the same functions. A mandatory unit Standardization Committee at brigade and battalion levels ensures inter-unit standardization and amends local certification matters as necessitated by unique mission or environmental conditions. The Aviation Branch maintains the highest-level certification entity, the Directorate of Evaluation and Standardization, to continually assess the health of the branch, ensure standardization across the entire force, develop or modify requisite tasks, and shepherd the branch’s standardization and certification programs.

To bolster branch-wide typology and interoperability, *The Commander’s Guide* even prescribes in exacting detail how all paperwork associated with evaluation and certification/re-certification is prepared, reviewed, inspected, and maintained. Aircrewmembers maintain a career-long training file that documents certifications, evaluations (successful or unsuccessful), and aviation accidents to include any consequential effects to professional status or certifications.

In summary, certification, or “standardization” in current Aviation Branch typology, is far more than just a personnel and training records management system. It is the pervasive touchstone of the aviation branch’s professional culture. As a leader’s

tool, it facilitates the effective manning, training, and resourcing of competent aviation crews and teams. For aircrewmembers, the established milestones, timelines, and evaluations clearly illuminate their “professional pathways” for increased competency and advancement. Ardent commitment to maintaining a competent and ready force – enhanced through a comprehensive and pervasive certification program – sustains Army Aviation’s ability to provide effective aviation support.

Field Artillery Case Study

Some Army organizations have similar military-technical certification programs for their Field Artillery Branch assets. *The 82nd Airborne Division Field Artillery Red Book* (henceforth, the *Red Book*) comprehensively details one such program employed to certify individuals and small elements in the safe, effective, and timely delivery of accurate fire support. The certification program also sustains perishable skills, assesses standards of precision, provides a framework for new skills to be developed and certified, and reinforces unit or institutional (Field Artillery Branch) professional standards.²⁷ The Division Fires Brigade is the entity responsible for standardization and certification across the division.

Like the aviation certification program, certification requirements are duty position but not rank dependent. For instance, howitzer gunner certification applies to any Soldier performing duties as “gunner” or “assistant gunner” in a howitzer section regardless of rank. Numerous key leaders and support personnel who oversee or enable the howitzer section must also complete the “gunner” certification (e.g. battery leaders, section chief, ammo team chief). Written and performance based evaluations using tasks, conditions, and standards codified in the *Red Book* are used to certify all required individuals before they are allowed to participate in live-fire gunnery events.

Other *Red Book* programs certify collective groups of fire support personnel such as fires support teams (FIST), howitzer sections, and fire direction centers (FDC).

These programs employ a myriad of increasingly broad and robust written and performance-based tools to evaluate and certify individual and collective proficiency of the 82nd Airborne Division's fire support entities responsible for computation, delivery, and observation. Criteria for certification are a mix of Field Artillery Branch tasks derived from institutional references and organizational unique tasks. Some tasks are assessed GO/NO-GO while others are evaluated against a point total. The *Red Book* clearly defines the minimum performance standards for successful individual and collective certification. Like the aviation certification program, The *Red Book* stipulates the required frequency of certification and the minimum time to complete certification once assigned to various duty positions. There are provisions in The *Red Book* that allow commanders to continue the mission when any individual on a collectively certified small team becomes unavailable. Some small fire support entities (e.g. the Fire Direction Center) can be de-certified for not achieving the minimum score on a required evaluation or experiencing a poor safety or improper firing incident. The *Red Book* details the proper de-certification and certification authorities and the retraining and re-certification requirements before the FDC may participate in live-fire gunnery events.

Lastly, some subordinate organizations in the 82nd Airborne Division have additional certification programs that complement the Red Book. 3rd Brigade Combat Team (3 BCT) employs a Combined Arms Maneuver Live Fire Exercise (CAMLFEX) Leader Certification program to prepare, assess, and certify company and battery leaders before they conduct any maneuver live fire training. The 3 BCT certification is

in addition to the *Red Book* certification requirements for battery commanders.

CAMLFEX certification is a comprehensive four phase process that employs individual study and examination, hands on performance, and demonstration of tactical and doctrinal proficiency to both the battalion commander (phase III) and the brigade commander (phase IV). The brigade commander is the final certification authority.

Six Key Tenets from the Case Studies

Inarguably, standardization and certification of competency enhance the effectiveness and safety of the aviation and field artillery forces. Though established to certify vastly different military-technical competencies, the aviation and field artillery programs codified in *The Commander's Guide* and *The Red Book* validate the four tenets of effective certification offered earlier and highlight two additional tenets. A review of all six tenets is in order. First, certification requirements are independent from an individual's rank or time in service. Such rank agnostic application demonstrates to aspiring and junior professionals - and the American public - the significance of certification and helps inculcate a sense of professional commitment to competency across the entire force. No matter the rank, whether the Brigade Commander or a junior Warrant Officer, every Army Aviator holding a similar certification (e.g. pilot-in-command) must maintain the same standards for competency. Second, the requirement to be certified is constant for the duration of assignment to the respective duty position instead of episodic events or deployments driving certification requirements. Persistent certification sustains effective individual or collective competency and moderates gross fluctuations in unit readiness. Persistent and force-wide certification programs also provide unit and branch leadership with excellent health of-the-force assessment tools for modification of training plans, prioritization of

resources, and talent management. The constancy and pervasiveness of these certification programs, especially the aviation program, provide exceptionally well-defined individual pathways for professional advancement. Third, branch-wide certification standards and a typology with inherent hierarchical titles like pilot, pilot-in-command, and instructor pilot – and the commensurate increase in responsibilities and professional respect for each title - intrinsically motivate members of the profession to seek greater levels of competency. Fourth, the certification programs use a combination of objective evaluations and subjective assessments by commanders. Objective evaluations provide clearly defined standards while subjective assessments permit commanders to use their discretionary judgment to accommodate unique circumstances, conditions, or mission requirements when determining certification status for each individual. Subjective assessments are also critically important for the commander's ability to de-certify a professional regardless of that individual's performance on objective evaluations. Fifth, the aviation and field artillery programs well balance the tenets of mission command. Once certified, individuals and small teams are empowered and trusted to perform their assigned functions ethically and to standard without overbearing micromanagement from higher headquarters. Professionals are generally free to perform their functions until encountering a limit or caveat beyond which the original certification is no longer valid. The aviation and field artillery programs include the processes, risk mitigating steps, and the commander's discretionary actions available to address such contingencies. Sixth, and last, the aviation and field artillery programs remain nested with other readiness and personnel management systems. These certification programs cultivate strong intrinsic

motivations through strict adherence to meritocratic principles – always ensuring professionals can associate military-technical competency to advancement, recognition, and reward. Whereas this was not always the case, since the late 1990s the Aviation Branch has worked diligently to infuse such meritocratic principles across the force. Placing aviation competency foremost in the institutional criteria used to select, assign, promote, and cull individuals has improved the aggregate effectiveness and professionalism of the total aviation force.

The Aviation Branch and field artillery certification models, while essential, are not sufficient for independently determining advancement in the Army Profession. Complementary processes must assess and certify the other criteria such as character and commitment detailed in ADP 1 and ADRP 1 (draft). Still, the aviation and field artillery programs highlight tenets that are useful no matter the expertise requiring certification. It appears that the Fire Direction Center and Air Mission Commander certification processes that employ comprehensive military-technical evaluations and subjective assessments by peers and certification authorities (e.g. battalion and brigade commanders) provide the most relevant starting point for certification in other areas of the Army's military-technical expertise. Subjective assessments provide the opportunity to certify any number of Army, organization, or task specific competencies – perhaps most importantly ethical application of military expertise and discretionary judgment. Such subjective assessments are most valid when formed through prolonged and persistent evaluation across the widest range of conditions and missions. Complex and challenging scenario based evaluation events such as the CAMLFEX and Air Mission Commander Check-Ride are also very effective assessment tools that are suitable for

many of the profession's competencies. Each branch and proponenty in the Army Profession can realize increased effectiveness and professionalism through employing the tenets of the aviation and field artillery certification models found in *The Commander's Guide* and *The Red Book*.

Application of Case Study Insight to Evolving Work on Certification

With regard to military expertise, neither rank nor time in service is directly proportional to greater competency. Rank - along with duty position - simply defines the breadth and complexity of each professional's specific military expertise responsibilities. It does not describe how effectively (or ethically) the professional applies their abstract knowledge (e.g. campaign logistics planning or leadership) or to what degree they have mastered the practice of their unique skill (e.g. marksmanship or parachute rigging). Rank is not predictive of competency, especially when there is no previous certification of effectiveness in similar duties, responsibilities, or special skills at an earlier rank. Progressively higher rank does denote broader and more complex abstract knowledge requirements. However, competency must be assessed relative to the profession's established expectations, responsibilities, and duties. Competency may also be measured against that of other professionals with the exact same duties and responsibilities. Thus, with respect to their own unique military expertise requirements, a Staff Sergeant may be more competent than a Brigadier General. Similarly, rank does not indicate nor predict professionalism. However, unlike competency, an Army professional's character must be assessed relative to the rank-agnostic norms, behaviors, and standards embedded in the Army profession's culture – thus the Staff Sergeant and Brigadier General are held to the same standard. Commitment – also

one of the 3 Cs – is another rank-agnostic certification criterion that must be employed across the Army profession with unvarying application.

To better establish and inculcate certification across the Total Army, I recommend the development of a Competency Assessment Framework. Such a framework should employ four methods to assess the competency expected of each member of the Army profession. The methods are new certifications, re-certifications, recognition of professional excellence, and development of expert knowledge (military expertise).

New certifications recognize newly acquired or mastered skill and abstract knowledge attained through education, training, or experience. These certifications should be mandatory to assume the associated duties or practice the associated skill – they are go/no go certifications assessed by designated individuals. Examples include award of a Military Occupational Specialty Additional Skill Identifier (ASI) or successful progression from pilot to pilot-in-command or from basic airborne jumper to airborne jumpmaster. Some new certifications recognize successful cumulative performance or a potential for service at a higher rank or leadership position. Selection by a centralized promotion or command selection board represents such a certification. Awarding of the “joint qualification” works in a similar manner. Junior ranks predominantly receive certification in the practice of military-technical expertise while higher ranks predominantly receive certification in the application of both military-technical and political-cultural expertise. Attaining a new certification denotes an increase in competency.

Re-certification, the second method in the recommended framework, ensures a professional's sustained ability to effectively apply their unique military expertise or perform assigned tasks with discipline and to standard. Examples include the Army Physical Fitness Test, individual marksmanship assessment, periodic vehicle or aircraft operator evaluations, and performance evaluations like the Noncommissioned Officer Efficiency Report. These re-certifications are mandatory to continue the associated duties or practice the associated skill – they are go/no go certifications. Failure to attain re-certification denotes a lack of competency and should generate a number of progressive consequences including; retraining, restriction from practicing specified skills, removal from the associated duty or leadership position, and recording of the failed re-certification and resulting actions.

The third method, recognition of excellence, is a profession's way to acknowledge members who have demonstrated exceptional practice or application of their unique professional expertise as measured against the profession's established standards or measured relative to the competency of their peers. Such recognition is not mandatory to advance in the profession or continue practice of previously certified competencies but it may facilitate advancement ahead of peers. In the Army profession, recognition comes from surpassing your peers at certain events such as winning a Top Gun award or the Best Ranger Competition or exceeding the standards at an education course such as earning Distinguished Honor Graduate from the Noncommissioned Officers Advanced Leaders Course. Recognition may come from an ad-hoc assembly of professional members or an established professional association. Examples include selection as the command's Soldier of the Quarter, membership in

the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club, or designation as the Army Aviation Association of America Aviator of the Year. Attainment of recognition for professional excellence denotes excellence in application or practice, albeit perhaps only temporary or in one narrow sub set of the professional expertise. Regardless, a professional so recognized has outperformed the standards of the profession or a group of his/her peers. Such performance should more prominently influence any assessment of the individual's competency and suitability for advancement. Annual performance reports may reflect such accomplishments, but the Officer and Enlisted Record Brief now have no mechanism to systematically capture such info.

The fourth method I recommend I am calling 'continual development of military expertise.' This is one of the Army's critical tasks to sustain its ability to provide landpower for the national security and defense of the American people, and any certification framework should encourage broad participation.²⁸ Civilian professions refer to such development as "advancing" or "furthering" the profession. Activities such as publishing scholarly articles, participating in professional panels, presenting at academic or professional gatherings, or teaching within the profession all further the profession's body of abstract knowledge and advance individual professional growth. In the Army profession, varied organizations like the Army Chief of Staff Strategic Studies Group and the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth consistently develop the profession's military expertise in a number of areas including leadership, education, ethics, doctrine, concepts, and simulation. Like the first two methods in this framework, certification and recognition of excellence, the Officer and Enlisted Record Brief should

capture an individual's notable contributions towards developing the Army's expert knowledge.

Much work remains to refine the certification criteria unique to each distinct subset of the Army Profession (branches and proponentencies). Don Snider referred to such refinement as "the professional development pathways for individuals."²⁹ Much of the criteria already exist in current MOS and duty descriptions, leader requirements models, Department of the Army Civilian career maps, or established local certification programs. The four fold-framework of different methods of competency assessment should help the Army to develop certification criteria for each Military Occupational Specialty and duty position.

Conclusion

As a reminder from an earlier era, the Army War College Class of 1920 offers another interesting example of using competency assessment as criterion for selection and assignment. Of the 78 members of the 1920 Army War College Class, ten did not graduate and three of those that did graduate were not certified for command or service on the Army General Staff.³⁰ In stark contrast however, today's senior professional military education bona fides or certification seems to come solely from selection to attend a Senior Service College. Among all graduates, there is no stratification or caveats with bearing on future leadership or staff assignments and serving professionals consider Academic Efficiency Reports (AERs) garnered in any military school simply irrelevant. The only qualitative military education information recorded on the Officer Record Brief is "Distinguished Military Graduate" if an Officer attained such distinction from their original commissioning source. But, are all graduates of professional education courses equally competent? Is performance in professional

education courses indicative of future performance or potential? These questions demand further analysis to refine the recommended Competency Assessment Framework.

Unlike the certification rigor applied to the 1920 War College class, the Army's current professional certification process lacks the necessary fidelity to generate effective and widespread certification programs for the 3 Cs. I am confident in the value of the six tenets derived from the Army Aviation and field artillery case studies. These tenets must inform the Army's evolving work on certification methods and programs. By employing both objective evaluations and subjective assessments, the six tenets can be applied across the broad scope of military art and science resident in the Army Profession – while still letting commanders exercise their discretionary judgment. Such commander involvement is critical for the maintenance of a professional culture instead of a burdensome, inflexible, bureaucratic environment. Widespread certification programs, underpinned by the six key tenets derived from the case studies and properly nested with other Army readiness and personnel systems, will do much to inculcate a self-sustaining meritocratic culture. Such a culture will attract, retain, and advance those individuals most desirable – and necessary – to the professional status of America's Army.

Endnotes

¹ U.S. Department of the Army, *ADRP 1: The Army Profession – Initial Draft*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, September 25, 2012), 2-1.

² Ibid., Forward.

³ Ibid., 2-2.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, *US Army Profession Campaign Annual Report*, (West Point, NY: Center for the Army Profession and Ethic, April 2, 2012), 1. In CY 2011 The Center for the Army Profession and Ethic completed a comprehensive one-year study of the Army Profession and subsequently published the Campaign Report in April 2012.

⁶ *Campaign Annual Report*, 10.

⁷ Don M. Snider, Senior Editor, *US Army Profession Campaign Annual Report (2012)*, multiple interviews by author, Carlisle, PA, November 2012 to February 2013.

⁸ *ADRP 1*, v (figure 1).

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-2.

¹¹ Anonymous, "NEHA's "Stamp of Approval": Top Ten Reasons to Seek Certification," *Journal of Environmental Health*, (March 1998): 27.

¹² U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Center for the Army Profession and Ethic, "Information Paper on CY13 America's Army – Our Profession Education and Training program," West Point, NY, 2012.

¹³ *ADRP 1*, 2-1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-2.

¹⁵ Charles D. Allen, "Assessing the Army Profession," *Parameters*, (Autumn 2011): 73.

¹⁶ *ADRP 1*, 2-2.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of the Army, *ADP 1: The Army*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, September, 2012), 2-4 and U.S. Department of the Army, *ADRP 1: The Army Profession – Initial Draft*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, September 25, 2012), 2-2.

¹⁸ Allen, "Assessing," 74.

¹⁹ *ADRP 1*, ix.

²⁰ Snider interviews by author, November 2012 to February 2013.

²¹ *ADRP 1*, Forward.

²² Snider interviews by author, November 2012 to February 2013.

²³ *ADRP 1*, 2-2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Snider interviews by author, November 2012 to February 2013.

²⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, *TC 3.014: Commander's Aircrew Training Program for Individual, Crew, and Collective Training*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, November 19, 2009). TC 3.014 (formerly TC 1-20: The Commander's Guide) is the foundational document for the Army Aircrew Training Manual series and establishes all requirements for a unit's Aircrew Training Program (ATP). Although used in the TC 3.014, "certification" in current Army Aviation typology is more narrowly defined than the broader method to validate an individual or unit's competency as recommended throughout this work.

²⁷ U.S. Army 82nd Airborne Division, "82nd Airborne Division Field Artillery Red Book, Fort Bragg, NC, July 3, 2011 and LTC John Rafferty, former commander of a field artillery battalion in 3 BCT, 82nd Airborne Division, multiple interviews by author, Carlisle, PA, December, 2012 and January, 2013.

²⁸ *ADRP 1*, 2-1.

²⁹ Don M. Snider and Lloyd J. Mathews, eds., *The Future of the Army Profession* (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 231.

³⁰ Edward Cox, Kent Park, Rachel Sondheimer, and Isaiah Wilson, "Growing Military Professionalism Across Generations," *Military Review*, Special Edition (September 2011): 41.

